

Merry Christmas To Family & Friends email 12/17/14

Dear Family & Friends,

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays! I hope that you all had an awesome 2014 & are doing well as we enter this blessed holiday season.

For new readers of my annual Christmas e-mail: I started this several years ago as a way to not only share what has been going on with me, but more importantly to hopefully to solicit responses from each of you regarding what has been happening with you over the past year --- which is much easier for most busy folks to do if they have an incoming email on which to simply tap "Reply". :-)

2014 for me was a year of wonderful reunions & discoveries, but also sad loss. Generally, it was a very busy, exciting year, which included getting reconnected with my former college roommates and Varsity teammates from the Naval Academy, and meeting new members of the ever-expanding Blackledge family ----- all while continuing to enlarge my digital universe through Apple University classes, broadening my Salsa adventure, and enhancing my domicile through a major home remodeling.

In May, my fellow Naval Academy classmate and Varsity Heavyweight Rowing teammate Charlie flew all the way from Florida (with the blessing of his very understanding wife) to join me in representing our class at the Inaugural Navy Crew Alumni Banquet, held in the Varsity Room of the Navy/Marine Corps Stadium in Annapolis. It was an extraordinary event, with over 200 attendees, official programs, personalized Varsity "N" name plates, multiple Navy photographers, & keynote address by a four-star Admiral. For both Charlie & me, it was also accompanied by a number of wonderful discoveries-----that pictures of our long-ago victory at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) National Championships were published not only in the official IRA Press Release and Program, but were also published in Sports Illustrated and in the New York Times ----- and also that Charlie's and my names are permanently inscribed on a brass plaque in the Varsity Room of the Navy/Marine Corps Stadium. Here are the IRA pictures:

--- IRA program & Press Release picture, in which we are demonstrating the tradition of holding aloft the racing jerseys of all the teams we had vanquished: Charlie is second from left, I am third from left.

[photo 001 - grainy crew]

--- Sports Illustrated picture showing us following another rowing tradition, of celebrating victory by throwing the coxswain in the water which we dominated. Charlie is in the middle and I am second from left. (Note: Charlie went on to row in the Olympic trials, and was actually selected to compete for the U.S in the Olympics, but was terribly disappointed when the Navy would not grant him the necessary leave to continue the necessary training & competition.

[photo 002]

--- New York Times picture of our racing shell winning by more than two lengths over our nearest competitor in the three mile race between the top 16 rowing colleges in the nation.

[photo 003]

Charlie & I were also honored with a personal tour of the renovated Hubbard Hall Crew House by Navy Varsity Coach Friedrich, which included Coach Friedrich's presentation to me on the IRA Championship history of the racing shell "CAPT Allan Blackledge", which my siblings & I had donated to the Naval Academy in memory of my father who was also a Naval Academy graduate. (History Summary: After the "CAPT Allan Blackledge" was last rowed to victory by Navy Varsity Heavyweights at the IRA National Championships, it was retired & permanently affixed to the ceiling of the Hubbard Hall Varsity Banquet Room as a lasting memorial).

In November, I was back at the Naval Academy again ----- this time for a reunion with my entire graduating class. In between, and throughout 2014, I was part of several Blackledge Family Mini-Reunions. Here are pics:

--With Doug Blackledge in Florida:

[photo 004]

-- With Paiz/Balands in DC:

[photo 005]

-- With David Blackledge & his daughter Charlene in Baltimore:

So 2014 left me fully qualified to sing the Peaches & Herb classic "Reunited, And It Feels So Good." :-)

But, unfortunately, in the midst of so much joyous reunion and discovery, 2014 was a year of great loss ---- due to the sudden death of my beloved sister Barbara. Barbara had been not only my sister, but also my confidante and best friend ----- always there to help, to support me during bad times, and to rejoice with me during good times. When I was a Midshipman at the Naval Academy (USNA), my roommate & I decided to embark on an USNA-prohibited weekend, departing from my USNA-prohibited apartment in Annapolis, driving my USNA-prohibited motorcycle, and wearing our USNA-prohibited civilian clothes. Our super-prohibited adventure was going great until my motorcycle broke down on the Capitol Beltway at 1am. If we had been picked up by the police, with a report

going back to the Naval Academy, my Naval career C&B ould have been very short. Luckily, I was able to get ahold of Barbara, who drove out in the middle of the night, helped us load my moribund motorcycle into the back of her vehicle, and spirited us to the safe anonymity of her home -----without her uttering a word of recrimination. Years later, when our wonderful father died, Barbara enthusiastically supported my request that she help me remember & honor our father by joining me on a cross-country "Jack Kerouac" type trip to trace all the major places of our father's life ----- from our father's grave at Arlington to his birthplace in Nebraska to his family members in Seattle, and all of his favorite locales in between. And more years later, when the Assistant Secretary Of The Navy held a special ceremony for me in the Pentagon to present me with the Superior Civilian Service Medal, Barbara was right there in the front row, beaming with pride & joy. Always there, always smiling, always encouraging & supporting. I was so appreciative that my nephew Doug drove all the way to Naples, Florida to join me in remembering and honoring Barbara's life. Doug video-recorded Barbara's Memorial Service and my emotional Eulogy, and posted it at the following link.

[Barbara Blackledge Service and Eulogy](#)

My sincere wishes to each of you for a glorious holiday season, and a spectacular 2015

Pete